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# Soybean Group Warns China Trade Rift Threatens US Farmers

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The American Soybean Association (ASA) has issued a sharp warning to Washington, urging the administration to prioritize a trade deal with China that restores U.S. farmers' access to their largest overseas market. Association leaders argue that America's soybean growers are nearing a breaking point as the prolonged trade standoff continues to cut them off from a critical buyer.

“U.S. soybean farmers are standing at a trade and financial precipice,” ASA President Caleb Ragland, a Kentucky farmer, wrote in a letter released Tuesday. “Prices continue to drop, and at the same time, our farmers are paying significantly more for inputs and equipment. U.S. soybean farmers cannot survive a prolonged trade dispute with our largest customer.”

For decades, China was the dominant purchaser of U.S. soybeans, at times importing more than 60 percent of the world’s supply. The U.S. once held a leading position as Beijing’s primary supplier. That advantage has slipped in recent years after Beijing imposed retaliatory tariffs, making U.S. soybeans roughly 20 percent more expensive than South American alternatives. Critics argue the tariffs have created an uneven playing field, hurting American producers while benefiting competitors abroad.

Brazil has rapidly expanded production to meet Chinese demand, solidifying its role as the top supplier. Analysts warn that without decisive action, the U.S. risks permanently losing ground to Brazil at the expense of its farmers. As harvest season nears, American growers face the troubling prospect of another year without major Chinese contracts.

“China has not purchased any U.S. soybeans for the months ahead as we quickly approach harvest,” Ragland cautioned. “The further into the autumn we get without reaching an agreement with China on soybeans, the worse the impacts will be on U.S. soybean farmers.”

A white paper released alongside Ragland’s statement details the long-term risks of ceding market share in China, the world’s largest soybean importer by a wide margin. In the 2023/24 marketing year, the U.S. shipped nearly 25 million metric tons of soybeans to China. By contrast, exports to the European Union — the second largest buyer — totaled just 4.9 million metric tons. The figures underscore Washington’s challenge: without China, the scale of American soybean production cannot be sustained.

Farmers are also being hit by higher costs for fertilizer, fuel, and machinery. Industry groups contend that the combination of foreign tariffs and rising domestic expenses is squeezing producers to the point where government inaction risks hollowing out rural economies.

“The stakes for farm families are enormous,” Ragland said. “Every day without an agreement further erodes U.S. farmers’ market share in China. We strongly urge the administration to secure a deal that reopens this vital market for U.S. soybeans.”

With harvest approaching, the ASA's call reflects the urgency felt across the Midwest and Plains. Observers note that unless the administration moves swiftly, U.S. soybean farmers could face not only short-term financial pain but also a long-term strategic loss to global competitors.